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The Consummation of a Good Man's Life.

A SERMON,

DELIVERED IN THE

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH, NORWICH, CONN.,

MAY 25, 1856,

OCCASIONED BY THE DEATH OF

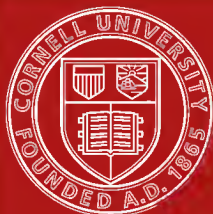
JAMES STEDMAN, Esq.

BY H. P. ARMS.

Published at the Request of the Family.

NORWICH:

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SERMON.

PSALM XXXvii: 37.—“MARK THE PERFECT MAN, AND BEHOLD THE UPRIGHT,
FOR THE END OF THAT MAN IS PEACE.”

The Psalmist here points us to the consummation of a good man's life. It is in striking contrast to that of the wicked. The one is driven away in his wickedness; the other hath hope in his death. The one shall perish; the inheritance of the other shall be forever. The end of the one is cut off; the end of the other is peace. Nor is this an arbitrary distinction.

The peaceful happy death of the righteous man is the legitimate fruit, the logical result of his upright, godly life.

Such is the sentiment of the text. In proof of it, David appeals to the common observation of men. The passing events of God's providence demonstrate that a life characterized by integrity and uprightness is usually crowned at the close with serene and bright anticipations of the future.

I. Mark the *character* of the righteous, described in the text as perfect and upright.

These terms are employed as synonymous, and explanatory of each other. The perfection here predicated of the

righteous man is not entire freedom from sin. No man liveth and sinneth not ; and yet the Scriptures ascribe perfection to men. Job was a perfect man, and yet he sinned. He had the elements of moral excellence, but not in sufficient strength to secure him from all error. Scriptural perfection consists rather in completeness of parts, and symmetry of the whole, than in perfect holiness. One may be endowed with all the graces of the Spirit, and yet those graces may be immature, and wanting that fullness of strength which belongs to the highest grade of Christian piety. The perfect man is in the text equivalent to the upright man ; one who is truly under the control of right moral principles, who loves God supremely, and aims at obedience to our Saviour's golden rule in all his intercourse with men.

In the beginning uprightness was man's birthright. He was made in the image of God, and for a season adorned himself with perfect holiness. All the passions of his soul were in harmony with the divine will. All his powers, physical, intellectual and moral were in perfect subjection to the divine command. As he came from the hand of his Maker he was good, very good.

But man has fallen. His physical frame indeed still stands erect, with countenance looking heaven-ward, to indicate his former excellence ; but his moral powers are prostrate in the dust. That higher life which was his birthright, and which pervaded all the faculties of his soul, is extinct. In the day that he transgressed God's law, and thus severed himself from the parent stock, he died, and he remains dead in trespasses and sins until, created anew in Christ Jesus, he is born again. Then the moral image of God reappears in his soul. Love to God, supreme, though not perfect as at the first, resumes its dominion over him. This inward renewing of the Holy Ghost, this washing of regeneration reveals itself in his out-

ward conduct. While it restores his alliance to God, it rekindles in his soul love to men. And where true benevolence reigns in the heart, it will find expression in acts of beneficence. "Love is the fulfilling of the law." The man who owns its sway will walk humbly with his God, and uprightly toward his fellow men. The worship of God is his delight, and practical obedience to the divine commands his daily food. As a father, he will train his children to habits of virtue and piety. He is the priest of his own household, and offers up their daily devotions. He imbues their minds with the knowledge of God, and goes before them in the path to heaven, teaching them by example as well as by precept, that man's true happiness consists in doing good.

As a citizen, he will make his private interests yield to the public good. He is the friend and patron of all those educational, charitable and religious institutions, on which the welfare of the community depends.

In the church he labors for its increase in purity, spirituality, efficiency and strength. In short, his influence is everywhere felt for good. He makes his mark on the world.

But it is the *end* of the perfect, the upright man, to which special reference is had in the text—for he has an end, a calm, serene and joyful end. Yes, the end of that man is peace.

II. Let us then, in the second place, mark *the peaceful end* of the righteous.

As he approaches the close of life, as he ascends the highlands which separate the visible from the invisible world—as Moses went up to the top of Pisgah to view the promised land and die—he is permitted to retrace the straight and ever onward path by which he has reached the summit of these delectable mountains, and at the same time to catch a glimpse of the bright world on whose very confines he stands. In

the review of his past course, in his present surroundings, and in his future prospects, is much to inspire him with peace.

1. In the *retrospect of his life* is much to console and give comfort to his departing spirit.

The most prominent object which meets his view, and occupies his thoughts, is the goodness of God. The tokens of his Father's love are manifold and constantly recurring. Goodness and mercy have followed him all the days of his life. O, how good, how kind the Lord has been to him! His cup has overrun with blessing. Not that God has given him perpetual sunshine, and uninterrupted prosperity. Trials he has had in common with other men, and conflicts, which have at times put to the test his power of endurance. But in all these he finds nothing to regret. The adversities of life have been so many blessings in disguise. The toils of life have strengthened him for service and for suffering in the cause of his divine Master. The sorrows of life were necessary to chasten his spirit and discipline it for heaven. He now understands the meaning of the apostle James, where he says: "Blessed is the man who endureth temptation, (i. e. *trial*,) for when he is tried he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him." Untried virtue is of little worth. Even Christ was tempted in all points as we are, and the Captain of our salvation was made perfect through suffering. The trial of the believer's faith is much more precious than of gold that perisheth, and will be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ. It is necessary to give vigor and maturity to his character.

The remembrance of his trials cannot disturb the serenity of the closing scene. It will rather enhance his joys.* Like the veteran warrior of a hundred battles, now reposing on his

* *Haec olim meminisse juvabit.*

laurels, he can look back to the conflicts of life as past and never to return. He has fought a good fight, he has finished his course, he has kept the faith. The contest may have been severe, but this cannot move him, for he is conqueror and more than conqueror. He has won the prize, and the crown is ready to be placed on his brow.

He is at peace with the world. The conflicts of opinion with men from whom he was compelled to differ, have left no scars on his soul. He can now look out benignantly upon the world, and recognize in every man a brother. If one feeling of resentment ever found a momentary lodging in his breast, it has long since taken its flight, and love now reigns supreme. By his integrity, kindness and beneficence he has won the confidence and esteem of the community. The world honors him for his uprightness, and is ready to acknowledge its indebtedness to him for the many benefits which he has bestowed upon it. It is grateful to his feelings, as he draws toward the close of his career, to see those whom he has benefitted by his counsels, his prayers, and his benefactions, gather round him with tokens of respect and gratitude, to cheer his departing spirit, and smooth his pathway to the grave.

It affords him no little satisfaction to know that he has helped to form the mind, and mould the character of men now distinguished for their virtues and their usefulness; so that while he dies, he still lives in those who come after him, and who will propagate the generous impulses of his soul to generations yet unborn.

Not even the remembrance of past errors can disturb his peace, nor for one moment hide from him the light of God's countenance; for he calls to mind also the superabounding grace which gives him assurance of pardon and acceptance. Thus the review of the past ministers comfort and joy to his departing spirit.

2. In his *present surroundings*, in the closing scene itself, of a good man's life, is much to inspire him with peace.

True, it costs him a pang to sever the tie which has so long bound him to a circle of loving friends. But while death separates him from loved ones on earth, it reunites him to those who have gone before to glory. And those who survive will soon follow, so that all with whom he has had christian fellowship on earth, will, after a momentary separation, rejoin his happy spirit in a brighter world. This hope of a speedy reunion reconciles him to the present parting, and plucks away the sting of death.

The pains of dissolution have little terror for him. They are but for a moment, and are often much less severe than they seem to anxious friends. Besides, where the soul is stayed upon God, and cheered with a Saviour's presence, no pains external to the mind, no sufferings of the flesh, can disturb its peace.

The fact that his departure is at hand awakens no solicitude, for the love of life is giving place to a desire to depart and be with Christ. He would not live-always. He has had enough of life's toils and burdens, and with an unshaken hope of heaven, he knows that "to die is gain." As the objects of sense gradually fade from his sight, and the voices of earth are no more heeded, brighter scenes open to his view, and the music of heaven ravishes his ear. He now sees with other eyes, and hears with other ears than pertain to mortality. His spirit has already visions of heaven, while struggling to free itself from the flesh. Sometimes he so far returns from these confines of the heavenly world as to be able to tell of the wonders he has seen, and the seraphic sounds he has heard. Sometimes the only token of the rapture he experiences, as he enters the threshold of bliss, is the celestial smile which plays upon his countenance ; and sometimes it is in the

incoherent half uttered sentences, which his friends mistake for indications that his mind is wandering. His mind is indeed wandering, and far away—it is wandering from earth to heaven. And while still cleaving to the body, it seems to hold converse with the invisible world, and to commune with those ministering spirits who are sent to bear him to his final home, and to the bosom of his Saviour.

Here is seen the value of faith. It enables the believer almost to put on immortality before he puts off the mortal. It gives him firm foothold, even while the billows of death roll over him. It fills his soul with peace and joy, and heavenly serenity; while all around him is agitation, weeping and distress. Earth does not elsewhere present so sublime a spectacle, as that of the Christian thus meeting the king of terrors undismayed, and rejoicing in hope full of immortality. This is the hour of his triumph. The joys which cluster here are worth a life time of toil and self denial. "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his."

3. In addition to the rich consolations which the past and the present pour into his bosom, the *future* also reveals to the believer its choicest treasures. Allusion has already been made to this topic, while speaking of present joys. It could hardly be avoided, for the present, in itself considered, has no duration. It is but the separating point between the past and the future. From these two sources it mostly derives its pleasures. While the past has much precious treasure laid up in the store-house of memory, hope crowns the expiring saint with bright anticipations of the future. All his joyful experiences in this life are but the pledge of richer blessings to come. As he approaches the borders of the promised land, even before he crosses the narrow stream which ends his pilgrimage, he gathers some rich clusters of its abounding fruit.

It is no foreign land which he seeks, it is his own native home, his paternal inheritance, confirmed to him by the promise and oath of God. For he is "born not of blood nor of the will of man, but of God." The years of his minority are ended, and he now comes in possession of the promised inheritance. He is about to be clothed upon with his house which is from heaven. A few hours more, perhaps a few moments only, and he shall appear with Christ in glory—like Christ, and recognized by this resemblance among all the hosts of heaven, as belonging to Christ.

The Scriptures exhaust the power of language in delineating the heavenly world. But its bliss is all summed up in this likeness to Christ. To be near and like him who is altogether lovely, this is the consummation of the believer's wishes. Of this he has the promise and the foretaste. His near proximity to all this glory and blessedness lifts him above the fear of dissolution, and inspires him with "peace as a river."

Thus do we see the past, the present and the future, all conspiring to pour their treasures at the feet of the dying Christian, and to fill his heart with joy unspeakable, and full of glory. Truly, "the end of that man is peace."

In thus delineating the consummation of the believer's course, we have no occasion to draw upon fancy. God in his providence is furnishing us illustration of the truth which constitutes the theme of the present discourse.

Last Sabbath morning, at about the hour when our Saviour is supposed to have left the sepulcher, the senior officer of this church was summoned to meet that Saviour in his temple above.

On the first Sabbath of the present month he was ministering to you the symbols of the body and the blood of Christ. Little did you then think it was the last time you should

ever receive these sacred memorials at his hand. Had we known how near he stood to heaven, and how soon he would be a partaker of the glory shadowed forth in the holy supper, it would have added solemnity and sacredness to the occasion. Yet so it was. He was doing his last work, performing his last service to the church on earth. He might have said to us in the words of our Saviour: "I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until the day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom."

The Lord had need of him for higher and holier offices than serving tables, and he has left us to mourn that we shall see his face no more. Among the last of the generation to which he belonged, he has fallen asleep, and is gathered to his fathers.

An irreparable breach is made in his family, in the church, and in the community. And yet we would not if we could, call him back to earth. It was a kind, a merciful decree, which released him from the toils of earth, and welcomed him to the heavenly rest, before the infirmities of age had become a burden.

"Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright, for the end of that man is peace."

It is not my purpose to pronounce his eulogy. His family do not wish it; he has no need of it. Yet it is due to the position which he occupied as a public man, as well as to his private worth, that a brief outline be given of his history, and some facts noted in his long and useful life, for the instruction of survivors.

James Stedman was descended from a pious ancestry. He was the son of Thomas Stedman, of Hampton, in this State; a man who is still remembered in that region with the highest veneration for his stern integrity, and unbending Christian principles. He had ten children, of whom James was for some years the sole survivor. He designed him for the

Christian ministry, and in early life offered to educate him for that purpose. But the lad, with characteristic self-diffidence declined the offer, on the ground that he wanted evidence of his regeneration, and of that decided Christian character, which he justly regarded as an essential pre-requisite to the sacred office.

He could appreciate, however, the advantages of a liberal education, and when he was seventeen years of age, he entered Yale College, where he distinguished himself for his scholarship, under the presidency of Dr. Dwight.

Among his class mates, still living, are Thomas K. Brace, Henry Dwight, Joseph Trumbull, and Joseph Wood; and of the dead, Peter Hitchcock, and John W. Perit.

Among his cotemporaries and intimate friends in college, he numbered Isaac C. Bates, Jeremiah Evarts, Samuel Hubbard, Pelatiah Perit, and other names distinguished both in Church and in State. His early association with such men, and the lasting friendship which subsisted between them, contributed not a little to the formation of his character.

He was graduated with the honors of his class in 1801. The two subsequent years were spent in teaching a school in Charlestown, Mass., during which time he was an inmate of the family of the late venerable Dr. Morse.

At the expiration of this time, he was appointed Tutor in Yale College. This chair of instruction he occupied three years. Among his associates in office were the late Prof. Kingsley, Prof. Stuart, and Prof. Silliman who still survives.

He numbered among his pupils men who have distinguished themselves in the various learned professions. By his instructions and kind discipline he helped to form the characters of such men as Thomas H. Gallaudet, Thomas S. Grimke, Heman Humphrey, Gardner Spring, Richard S. Storrs, and Nathaniel W. Taylor. In these men, and in their con-

tributions to sound learning and true religion, he still lives, and will continue to live, long after that manly form which we have committed to the grave shall have mouldered back to dust.

The impressions made upon a young man's mind, and the impulses given to it during his college course, are usually permanent. Fifty years ago these impressions and impulses were more dependent than now upon individual influence. In those days, one tutor had almost the entire charge of a class during three years of their residence in college, and thus had opportunity to impress his own image on their plastic minds. The respect and veneration which the pupils of Mr. Stedman are known to cherish for him, bear witness to his fidelity as a teacher.

He was an accurate scholar, and had great facility in communicating instruction. He loved the employment, and since he established himself here in the practice of the law, he has had the training of many young men, both professional and general students, some of whom are now occupying posts of influence and usefulness in the country. Others have finished their course and gone before him to their final rest. Among the latter is the late Henry Strong, who cherished for him to the last, the respect and affection which are due to an elder brother.

His own professional studies he pursued under the tuition of the late Theodore Dwight, of Hartford.

In his domestic relations he was peculiarly happy. Forty-five years of conjugal life can testify to his affectionate fidelity as a husband ; and it must afford to the bereaved widow a mournful pleasure to recall, in her loneliness, the remembrance of his private virtues. Thus she may find consolation in the very topics which remind her most vividly of the greatness of her loss.

As a father, he was what Paul required a ruler in the church to be: "one that ruled well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity." The reins were in his own hands, and yet the subjects of his domestic rule had no occasion to complain of undue rigor in its administration. He bound them to him by the strong ties of confidence and affection. He was a fond father. He lived for his children as well as in them, and they are all ready to-day, those of them who survive, (for one is not,) to rise up and call him blessed, and to ascribe their success in life very much to their early training.

He was a friend to the poor, to the fatherless, and him that had none to help him. The blessing of him that was ready to perish came upon him, and he caused many a widow's heart to sing for joy. Few men could with more propriety adopt the language of Job, and say, "I was eyes to the blind, and feet was I to the lame. I was a father to the poor, and the cause which I knew not I searched out. And I brake the jaws of the wicked, and plucked the spoil out of his teeth." His professional services, his private charities, and the almost unbounded hospitality of his house, were put in requisition to relieve the unfortunate, and to vindicate the oppressed.

He had often represented the town in our State Legislature, and had been at the time of his death, for many years, Clerk of the Courts of New London County.

The confidence which the public reposed in his legal attainments, his sound judgment and tried integrity, caused him to be frequently selected as arbitrator in difficult cases, and to be employed in the settlement of estates.

Of the fidelity and ability with which he discharged the various trusts reposed in him, I have no need to speak. The integrity and trustworthiness with which he managed the

public interests that he had in charge, have never been questioned. The financial affairs of the Church and of the Society have for many years been in his hands, and the prosperous condition in which he leaves them, testifies both to his wisdom and faithfulness in their administration.

It only remains to speak of him as a *Christian*.

Of his early religious impressions I am not informed. It would seem however, that under the training of Christian parents, his conscience was educated aright, and that from his youth up, the convictions of his understanding were on the side of evangelical, experimental religion. When he had a family of his own he at once instituted family worship, which he ever after scrupulously maintained. He was careful to instruct his children in the knowledge of the Bible, and of the Assembly's Catechism,—two volumes which have done more to form the character of New England, than all the other books which were ever written. So exemplary was his deportment in these respects, long before he made a profession of religion, that persons trained in his own family never doubted his piety, or suspected that he was not a member of the church.

Soon after the Sabbath School was organized in this place, he became one of its most efficient teachers. During a season of special religious interest, in 1830, his whole class, it is believed, under his faithful instruction, became hopeful converts to Christ. This fact, by the blessing of God, awakened deep solicitude in his mind respecting his own spiritual condition, lest, after having taught others, and led them to Christ, he should himself be a cast-away. The result of this anxiety was a decided and open avowal of his faith in Christ, and a public profession of religion, which he has ever since faithfully maintained. From this period of his life he dated his saving experience of religion, and his hope of heaven.

In his theological views he was a Calvinist of the New England School, and a firm believer in those doctrines of grace which underlie the character of the sons of the Pilgrims.

His views of ecclesiastical polity were in accordance with the fathers of New England. The principles of our Congregational Churches he adopted and defended as most in accordance with primitive usage, and best adapted to our republican institutions. And yet he was no bigot. He would exclude none from his Christian fellowship, who gave evidence of piety, though they could not subscribe to every iota of his creed, or adopt the simple forms of worship and church organization which he preferred. Such exclusiveness was alike foreign to his own convictions, and to the principles of the Church which nurtured him.

The estimate in which his Christian character was held by his brethren may be inferred from the trust which they reposed in him. In 1837 he was unanimously elected to the office of Deacon. He had previously been the treasurer of the Church, and a member of the standing committee. All these offices he held at the time of his death. Nor had the Church ever occasion to regret the confidence thus reposed in him.

It will be seen from this brief sketch, that he bore an important part in our public affairs, and that many interests are affected by his removal.

A word touching the closing scene and I have done.

His end was peace. It came with little premonition, and yet it found him ready. His work was done, and well done; his mission on earth was accomplished. He had only to bid a brief adieu to friends and kindred, and then cheerfully obey the summons which called him to his final rest. As he saw the time of his departure at hand, he showed no

symptom of alarm, but reposing like a little child on the bosom of his Saviour, quietly sunk to rest.

The language of the twenty-third Psalm, which from his earliest recollections had been imprinted on his heart, and which he had taught to his children, as one of the first lessons to be learned, now afforded delightful utterance to his trust in God, and the overflowing of his gratitude and love. A member of his family repeated to him :

“ The Lord is my Shepherd.”

Immediately he responded :

“ I shall not want.”

The next clause was recited :

“ He maketh me to lie down in green pastures.”

Again he responded :

“ He leadeth me beside the still waters.”

In this way the whole Psalm was rehearsed.

At a later hour, just as he was sinking in the embrace of death, among the last words which were heard to fall from his lips, feeble and indistinct, were these : “ *rod—staff—comfort—*” and that voice was hushed to perpetual silence. But the departing spirit had a *rod* and a *staff* on which to lean, and hence feared no evil.

“ Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright, for the end of that man is peace.”

Here was no scene got up for effect, no hallucination of a mind unconscious of its own acts, but the calm self-possession of a good man passing through the great crisis of his existence, with humble confidence in God, and unshaken reliance upon the mediation and atonement of Jesus Christ.

The esteem in which he was held by his fellow citizens was expressed in the throng which assembled at his burial, and followed his remains in long procession to the grave.

As we laid him down in his quiet resting place, and then turned in sadness away, could the sentiment of the retiring crowd have found utterance in a single word, it would have been :

“PEACE TO THE MEMORY OF A MAN OF WORTH.”

And now, my hearers, in conclusion, would you encounter death with a like serenity of mind, would you have your entrance to eternity divested of all terror, meet your Saviour in the dark valley and find him the rod and the staff of your soul, you must shape your present course with reference to such an end. Would you have the presence of Christ to cheer you in death, you must walk with him while you live. Think not to spend your life in pursuit of the vanities of the world, and in the end to enjoy the consolations of religion.

Men die as they live. A peaceful, happy death, is not a special dispensation of God's providence. It is the legitimate result of a life devoted to his service. It is the perfect man, and the upright, whose end is peace.

Walk in the footsteps of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises, and you too shall triumph over the last enemy. You shall find him disarmed of his sting, and powerless to harm you. Angels shall minister to your departing spirit, while it yet lingers on these shores of mortality ; and as it wings its way to the upper world, Christ will own you among his chosen, welcome you to the green pastures, and bid you repose forever beside the still waters of Paradise.

APPENDIX.

REMARKS AT THE GRAVE.

“The fathers, where are they?” One after another has fallen, till the dead far outnumber the living.

The venerable man, whose remains we are depositing in the grave, was one of the few survivors of the generation to which he belonged. We had hoped that he might be spared to us for a few years longer. We needed the counsels of his age and of his experience. He was a pillar of the Church, and for nineteen years its oldest office-bearer. Though he had passed the period of three score years and ten, he had not outlived his usefulness. He was still in the vigor of a green old age, and in the active discharge of the various offices of trust, which the confidence and good judgment of his fellow citizens and his fellow Christians bestowed upon him.

Let these mourning relatives console themselves with the thought that their friend, father, husband, fell with his armor on, in the active service of his country and of his God.

In the last conversation which it was my privilege to have with him, he expressed the determination, should he recover,

his profession in Norwich, in the year 1806. He remained in Norwich till the time of his death, and was honored by his fellow citizens with various offices of trust in the State and the Church, which were ever fulfilled by him with the high integrity of a Christian man. Mr. Stedman, though actively engaged in the duties of his profession, retained his love for the studies of his early life, and was always a classical scholar of accurate and varied endowments. As an educator of youth, he was remarkably apt and successful; and not a few of our eminent public men acknowledge the debt they owe him for the skill and care with which he directed their early studies. As a man he was eminent for noble virtues; his unbounded generosity, his hatred of oppression, his scorn of meanness of whatever kind, his minute integrity, the strength of his attachments, the fervor of his feelings, which age itself never lessened, made him a man to be both trusted and loved. As a Christian he was a pillar in the Church, where for many years he was a Deacon, and active and earnest in works of mercy and piety. He died in the fulness of years, while yet his eye was not dimmed nor his natural force abated. Death met him suddenly, but could not meet him unprepared. When made aware that his end was near, he had no thought of making preparation, but said that he was, through Christ's love, even now ready; and passed into heaven while the words of faith were yet lingering on his dying lips.

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